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ABSTRACT

Whole language reading education is a constructivist view of learning with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. Constructivism asserts that human beings develop concepts through their own intellectual interactions and actions with the world. In whole language reading classrooms acceptance of learners means that the whole language reading teachers develop the classroom environment and the curriculum for and with the students, to meet their needs and excite them in learning about what interests them, as well as covering curriculum guidelines. The instruction received by students with learning disabilities (LD) often takes place in the resource room. Little attention is paid to the individual needs of the students with learning disabilities despite the legal requirement to do so. This paper, a literature review, addresses two areas pertaining to the development of reading ability. First, the paper investigates the development of reading ability in whole language classrooms. Then, it explores the development of reading ability in students with learning disabilities, including motivating an LD middle school student to read. It also discusses middle school student needs and preferences in reading. Contains 48 references. (NKA)

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Whole Language Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

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Whole Language Reading Instruction

Whole language reading is an outlook on education, a philosophy of education, a belief system about education. It is an educational theory that is research based (Harste, 1989).

Whole language reading education is a constructivist view of learning with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. Constructivism asserts that human beings develop concepts through their own intellectual interactions and actions with the world. Learning is not viewed as passive, but as an active continuing process. Developing reading skills is easier when learners are presented with authentic reading material (Weaver, Gillmeister-Krause, & Vento-Zogby, 1996). In the U.S., the beginning of whole language is traced back to the middle 1970s when Kenneth Goodman and others' insights into reading as a psycholinguistic approach gained recognition (Weaver, 1994). According to Weaver (1990), acceptance of learners meant that all learners were accepted regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background or other characteristics or labels. Likewise, in whole language reading classrooms acceptance of learners also means that whole language reading teachers develop the classroom environment and the curriculum for and with the students, to meet their needs and excite them in learning about what interests them, as well as covering curriculum guidelines.

Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores (1991) concluded that students in whole language reading classes were not kept busy doing readiness activities in preparation for later reading and writing but instead were given the support they needed to read whole texts from the beginning. Whole language reading teachers discovered from their classroom experiences that virtually all children can learn to read whole texts, even those so called

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special education students who before were sent to self contained classes or resource rooms.

Reading skills are taught through mini-lessons and conferences, in the context of students' reading. As an example: phonics is taught mainly through discussion and activities derived from texts the students read and reread with the teacher, and through writing the sounds they hear in words. Skills are taught when students are engaged in real life tasks (Watson, 1989).

Poplin (1988, p.405) lists 12 basic principles of the constructivist/whole language model of reading education. They include the following points:

1. The whole of the learned experience is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. The interactions of the learned experience transform both the individual's spiral (whole) and the single experience (part).
3. The learner's spiral of knowledge is self-regulating and self-preserving.
4. All people are learners, always actively searching for meaning and constructing new meanings.
5. The best predictor of what and how someone will learn is what they already know.
6. Learning often proceeds from whole to part to whole.
7. Errors are critical to learning.
8. Learners learn best from experiences about what they are passionately interested and involved.
9. The development of accurate forms follows the emergence of function and meaning.
10. Learners learn best from people they trust.
11. Experiences connected to the learner's present knowledge and interests are learned best.

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12. Integrity is a primary characteristic of the human mind.

Directly contrasting with this approach is the phonics based approach that consists of breaking reading into small steps or skills and building the reading ability of a learner one small step at a time (Adams, 1990). Successful reading is first measured as the ability to pronounce words isolated from textbooks. Learning proceeds from the part to the whole and reading cannot take place unless the pronunciation of words is mastered

Reading Ability

The measurement of student development in reading ability is complicated. Weaver (1994) affirmed that standardized testing does not measure a student's true reading ability. Making meaning is the essential ingredient of a good reader. Evaluating this process cannot be done by a single standardized test. Moreover, measuring the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities is a complex assignment (Weaver, 1994). I have witnessed many students with learning disabilities experience difficulty in pronouncing words, yet understand the central message of the reading assignment they were undertaking.

The instruction received by students with learning disabilities often takes place in the resource room. Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) described instruction in this setting as inappropriate for these students. Very little attention was paid to the individual needs of the students with learning disabilities despite the legal requirement to do so. Examining the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities placed in these settings may lead the researcher to false conclusions. Effective instruction should consider the needs of all students (Weaver, 1994). Raising the reading ability of all students is the benchmark for effective reading instruction. I will address two areas

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pertaining to the development of reading ability. First, the development of reading ability in whole language classrooms will be investigated. Next, the development of reading ability in students with learning disabilities will be explored.

Development of Reading Ability in Whole Language Classrooms

Students in whole language classrooms seem to develop greater ability to use phonics knowledge more effectively than children in more traditional classrooms where skills are practiced in isolation. In Freepon's (1991) study, 12 children in two first-grade classrooms that utilized a whole language approach were compared with 12 children in two first-grade classrooms that used a skills based approach. Freepon found that the children in the two whole language classrooms had a better sense that reading was constructing meaning with print and were almost twice as successful in sounding out words.

A 1990 study by Stice and Betrand focused on emergent literacy of at-risk students. The study involved 50 primary age students over a two-year period and concluded that students in whole language reading classrooms were more aware of alternative strategies for dealing with problems, such as particular words. Furthermore, the students in whole language classrooms appeared to focus more on meaning and the communicative nature of language. Likewise, the students in whole language classrooms seemed to develop greater independence in both reading and writing. Finally, standardized test scores (Stanford Achievement Test) of students in whole language classrooms were slightly better than the scores of children in traditional classrooms. Students in whole language classrooms seem to develop more strategies for dealing with problems in reading. In the study by Stice and Betrand, students typically developed six

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strategies for dealing with problem words, while students in skills based classrooms developed only three.

A recent qualitative study (Freepon & McIntrye, 1999) showed that students from a constructivist-based, whole language classroom read far longer than did the students from a skills based classroom. Additionally, the level of courage, persistence, and application of reading strategies were different. The students from the constructivist-based classroom had greater breadth in knowing what being a reader encompasses and a greater willingness to try. The authors asserted that this difference would not be captured on standardized measures of reading. Additionally, similar results were obtained in relation to classroom oral reading proficiency. A study by Cantrell (1999) on Kentucky's Educational Reform Act showed that students from classrooms where teachers used a meaning-centered whole language approach achieved higher reading and writing scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, providing evidence that whole language reading education does increase scores on a standardized test.

Daniels and Zemelman (1999), presented conclusive evidence that whole language instruction works. They reviewed more than 60 years of research demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach to beginning reading instruction. The authors found that 15 studies validated the comparative effectiveness, at a statistically significant level, of one or another element used in whole language classrooms. Additionally, five studies showed significantly higher test scores in broader whole language classrooms than in traditional classrooms. One study showed no difference between whole language and traditional classrooms while two smaller case studies demonstrated the effectiveness of whole language models of reading instruction. Daniels and Zemmelman encouraged the

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opponents of whole language instruction to examine the research and conclude this form of instruction is powerful for the beginning reader.

Development of Reading Ability in Students with Learning Disabilities

Since the early 1990s some prominent researchers have argued for skills-based programs to help struggling and beginning readers learn to read. (Adams, 1990; Stahl, 1992). Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, and Seidenberg (2002) affirmed that beginning and struggling readers were more successful when they received systematic phonics instruction, instruction that was grounded in reductionistic theory building the reader's ability one skill at a time.

Opposition to whole language instruction. Groff (1998) maintained that a balanced approach to reading instruction incorporating literature is a mistake. Readers prospered only when they received direct, explicit instruction in the phonetic code. Additionally, Groff promoted the idea that phonics taught within the context of reading books was out of touch with the scientific evidence. Frost and Emery (1995) suggested direct instruction in language analysis and the alphabetic code for students having dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Frost and Emery claimed that explicit instruction in the segmenting and blending of sounds would increase reading achievement.

A recent study followed 166 students ranging in age from 7 to 13 years who were diagnosed with developmental reading disability. These students underwent intensive training in word identification education. This training, when focused on phonological processing, produced significant outcomes in word identification (Lovett, Steinbach, & Frijters, 2000).

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Phonics instruction programs based on direct instruction methods are often used to instruct students having difficulty learning to read. One of the problems these programs may have lies in the view that there are no connecting themes among them and the different programs may be hampering the learning of the very students they are designed to help (Stahl, 1998). Stahl asserted that only by the teacher choosing one program to utilize for the student, could the teacher empower the student to advance in their reading ability.

A meta-analysis of 272 studies on effective methods to teach reading was conducted by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (Swanson, 2002). This meta-analysis examined research conducted over the past 30 years and produced several findings related to intervention for students with learning disabilities The most effective form of teaching children with learning disabilities to read combined components of direct instruction and strategy instruction. Important components of this combined model included: (a) sequencing, (b) drill-repetition practice, (c) directed questioning and responses. (d) control of task difficulty, (e) use of technology, (f) teacher-modeled problem solving, and (g) small group instruction.

Carroll (2000) asserted the correct method for teaching students with learning disabilities was straightforward. Incorporating psychological testing into the prerequisites for successful teaching, Carroll claimed that a teacher need only find the correct psychological test to diagnose the student's reading difficulties. Once diagnosed, the correct method for teaching reading could be identified and the proper corrective reading instruction then instituted. Carroll stressed that a direct instruction approach was necessary for the majority of students with learning disabilities.

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Hooks and Peach (1993) demonstrated the effectiveness of a synthetic phonics program for eight middle school youngsters in eighth grade. In this study, all of the students improved their word recognition skills from 10 to 27% after 12 weeks of intensive synthetic phonics lessons.

Advocates for whole language instruction. Directly contrasting with the previous studies is a review of the empirical evidence for phonics instruction by Wyse (2000). Wyse averred the existence of a weak link between phonics instruction and the research claiming to support it for struggling readers. Garan (2001) produced a strong critique of various claims made by researchers advocating a systematic phonics approach for teaching reading to students with learning disabilities. Garan claimed there is inadequate evidence for the assertion that systematic phonics instruction produced significant benefits for students having difficulty learning to read. Furthermore, Garan claimed the impact on spelling achievement was small for students who were poor spellers.

Lowe and Lowe (1992) discussed the usefulness of whole language reading instruction for at risk readers. At risk readers were defined as those who exhibit difficulty with word attack skills, have poor vocabulary attainment, and do not understand what they read. They discussed the typical reading instruction for at-risk readers which consisted of workbooks, skill exercises, and less challenging tasks than were given to their more literate peers. Questioning this approach for at-risk readers, they described the whole language reading classroom and its practices as being appropriate for a student with learning disabilities and being just what is needed in order to achieve success in reading.

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Bartoli and Botel (1988) demonstrated how an obsessive testing of trivia and a skills-oriented curriculum that provided more of the same skills work in which students did not excel were problems in searching for answers to improving reading ability for students with learning disabilities. They contended these approaches frequently isolated students from their peers and from the authentic reading and writing that their peers were doing.

Beringer, Abbott, Zook, Ogier, Lemos-Britton, and Brooksher (1999) found a whole language approach to be effective for increasing reading ability. In this study, a teacher modeling spelling and sound relationships to beginning readers was effective in teaching students to recognize and spell words without explicit phonics rules being taught.

Showers, Joyce, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt (1998) created a reading program based on whole language principles for adolescents who enter high school two or more years below grade level in reading. This program encouraged the reader to choose books he or she was comfortable with and to spend significant amounts of time in independent reading. Their program significantly increased the reading achievement of these at-risk adolescents. At the end of one semester in this program, students had increased more then one year's grade level in reading as measured by the Abbreviated Stanford Achievement Test.

A study by Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch, and Algozzine (1998) a whole language reading program that employed age appropriate materials, promoted independence in reading, and used repetition, immediate performance feedback, and a consistent approach increased the grade equivalent score by 9 to 18 months on the

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Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement over a six month period. At the conclusion of the study 31% of the students showed severe reading discrepancies, a 50% drop from the beginning of the program

Vaughn, et al. (1998) demonstrated that reading instruction in the typical resource room for special education students was problematic. Most of the teachers (11 of 14) in their study used whole group instruction followed by independent seatwork. Additionally, only a few of the teachers provided individualized differential work to complete. In nine classrooms, all students, regardless of ability were asked to read the same book. Ten of the 14 teachers identified whole language as the central approach they used to teach reading. They stated that students were more motivated and enjoyed the skills taught in context in a whole language environment. Only three teachers instructed their students in word decoding skills. The teaching of comprehension strategies was non-existent.

During 41 observations, only one instance of teaching comprehension strategies occurred. Overall, Vaughn et al. (1998) stated that reading instruction in the resource room was a broken promise because of its failure to provide an individualized reading program. Furthermore, the authors asserted other broken promises existed for special education teachers who were guaranteed the time and resources necessary for instructing these students. While these observations are consistent with the notion that whole language instruction was not effective for students with learning disabilities, the whole language procedures observed by Vaughn et al. did not coincide with the procedures advocated by whole language theorists (Weaver, 1994; Weaver, et al, 1996).

Phinney (1988) also questioned the effectiveness of traditional approaches used to instruct students labeled learning disabled. She noted the value of evaluating the

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individual processing styles of students and of planning instruction accordingly instead of forcing the students to be in instructional programs that prevent them from using their strengths. Phinney pointed out that instruction is often based on an analysis of language with the assumption that the smaller the visual or phonic unit a student had to deal with, the easier it was to learn. She stated that because of recent research, today's educators know the opposite is true.

Motivating a Middle School Student with Learning Disabilities to Read

Motivating the middle school student with learning disabilities to read is a daunting task. By the time these students arrive in a special education classroom, they have labeled themselves as failures in reading. They have given up. Reading instruction for them has usually resulted in frustration (McCray, 2001b). Investigating new teaching strategies and methods that might motivate these students to engage in reading is crucial.

Weaver et al. (1996) asserted that whole language instruction encompassing whole to part or analytical phonics instruction method was the boost that many students needed to overcome their reading problems. Therefore, this section of the literature review begins with an exploration of how phonics is taught in the whole language classroom. After studying the teaching of phonics in a whole language classroom, the research covering the needs of middle school students considered at risk for reading failure or with learning disabilities is probed. Finally, research focusing on middle school student preferences in reading will be examined.

Teaching Phonics in a Whole Language Classroom

In a recent study of how phonics is taught in a whole language environment, Dahl and Scharer, (2000) demonstrated that phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and

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phonemic segmentation instruction consumed more than one third of instructional time. They documented that numerous opportunities existed during the class's shared reading and writing time for instruction regarding vowel sounds and consonants. The data analysis revealed that teachers taught phonics strategies by giving procedural explanations about how to use the letter-sound concepts they were learning. In all of the classrooms observed, phonics instruction was woven into the daily whole language activities.

Dahl and Scharer (2000) found that long writing periods provided opportunities for children to deal with phonics concepts. Receiving help from the teacher and other students was a common occurrence. Additionally, teachers conducted phonics instruction by keeping track of the progress students were making and used various continuing assessments to help plan individual instruction. Writing samples, checklists, reading logs, and running records were used.

Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen (1999) argued for a whole to part phonics instruction approach. This type of phonetic instruction was often practiced in the whole language reading classroom. Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen contended that whole-to-part phonics instruction differed from traditional parts-to-whole phonics instruction in several ways. First, it grounded instruction in letter-sound correspondences in meaningful contexts and it built on spoken language instruction they already understood. Additionally, it taught letter-sound correspondences (onsets, rimes, and syllables) using units of spoken language familiar to children. Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen averred that this type of instruction is explicit, systematic, and extensive.

Whole language teachers use explicit help in developing phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge and decoding skills (Weaver, 1994). By teaching phonics through reading, minilessons, and writing, whole language reading teachers help students develop phonics knowledge in the context of books they enjoy reading and the stories they enjoy writing (Stahl & Kuhn, 1995).

Students' Needs and Motivation

Meeting the needs of a student will often motivate the student to become immersed in reading (Weaver, 1994). The literature concerning the needs of middle school students labeled at risk for reading failure and those with learning disabilities must be explored. The middle school student at risk for failure in reading often has undiagnosed learning disabilities. In addition, the concerns of both middle school students with disabilities and those without should be investigated in order to determine effective reading methods that will motivate these students to read.

Meeting the needs of middle school students with learning disabilities. A study by MacInnins and Hemming (1995) linked the needs of students with learning disabilities to a whole language curriculum. MacInnins and Hemming demonstrated that whole language is based on constructivist principles. It is a curriculum that is student centered because it places the needs of the student as the overriding factor. Students are allowed to take control of their learning and relate it to previous knowledge. The curriculum is language based and empowered the student to become a reader and writer. Each student is allowed to progress as quickly as their ability allows. Therefore, it is an inclusive curriculum, which does not separate students with learning disabilities into separate rooms for skills based instruction. The positive feeling each student attains because of

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this inclusion promoted positive attitudes towards learning. MacInnis and Hemming found that whole language education encouraged social interaction, which required learners to interact with each other in a supportive environment. A whole to part relationship encouraged learner exploration of the language. Skills were taught when the student needed them in the totality of the language.

Lowe and Lowe (1992) listed items they considered vital for at risk reader success. First, teacher modeling of active engaged reading must be present in the learning environment. Second, students should be provided with choices to read and the responsibility for choosing this material needs to rest with the student. Third, the whole language reading environment must be an engaging, literate environment that promoted literacy. Next, students must be provided with time to read silently. Lowe and Lowe further suggested that an incentive program be developed for promoting this silent reading. Finally, Lowe and Lowe proposed that writing activities take place along side of reading activities because the development of reading and writing activities take place together.

Weaver et al. (1996) viewed the teacher as a mediator and a facilitator to guide and provide support to the learner when necessary. Flexibility is the operative word. Mini lessons were provided when needed to address needed skills and to help learners build the critical skills necessary for success. A whole language curriculum held promise for meeting the needs of the middle school student with learning disabilities. It expanded the learning opportunities for all students.

In a recent study of stress for learning disabled middle school students, Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) reported that students with learning problems described more

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academic stressors, more peer stressors, and more stressors related to teachers and classroom management. These students reported they had difficulty keeping up with the class work, trouble learning new things, and difficulty following the teacher's directions. Additionally, they had more snags in making new friends, were bothered by older kids more, and more fear of weapons or violence. Students with learning problems differed in their perception of social support. Wenz-Gross and Siperstein affirmed they received less support form their peers but more support from adults. Students with learning problems experienced a poorer adjustment and a lower self-esteem. A whole language reading curriculum built on each learner's strengths rather than weakness may be just the segue the special education or at risk reader needs to become less stressed and therefore more successful in school activities.

Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) concluded that students with learning problems are a group at risk in middle school. They suggested these students need assistance with managing the academic, developmental, and social demands placed on them. A whole language reading curriculum provided assistance and motivation for these students. For the first time, they were free to become readers in their own right (Weaver, 1994).

Widdowson and Dixon (1996) demonstrated the positive effects that teacher modeling of silent sustained reading has on student silent reading. For both low and average achieving readers, substantial increases occurred in on-task behavior following the introduction of concurrent modeling by the teacher. At risk and special needs youngsters benefited from this form of teacher modeling. In a whole language reading environment both the teacher and student engage in a learning process together with

modeling as an integral part demonstrated by the teacher. Widdowson and Dixon suggested modeling behavior by the teacher prompted the at risk reader to read.

In a whole language learning environment, Weaver (1994) listed the following practices as being especially notable for special education students: (a) special education students are treated as capable and developing, (b) the learner's strengths are emphasized, (c) learners' unique learning abilities and strengths are valued, (d) the students' needs and interests help guide the development of the curriculum, and (e) assessment is based less on standardized tests and more on each student's individual growth during the assessment period. This growth was measured by how well the student progressed towards goals that were established for him or her during the assessment period. Finally, the teacher supported the learning of all students, by developing a supportive and self-esteem enhancing classroom atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the student was able to make responsible choices and to take responsibility for their work.

Middle school student needs in reading. Hosking and Terberg (1998) have examined what elements it takes for middle school students to be successful in literacy programs. Their research focused on a student-centered environment that enabled the learner to be successful. A student-centered environment empowered the learner to make responsible choices and allowed the student to be in control of their learning. The curriculum Hosking and Terberg advocated included many of the types of activities that took place in a whole language reading classroom and were the same activities that promoted the growth and learning of special education students.

Sanacore (2000) argued that promoting the lifetime love of reading should be one of the most important goals in middle school. Sanacore further stated that middle school

students should, through pleasurable reading, have the opportunity to apply skills to meaningful contexts, build general and specific knowledge, experience fluency with connected text, and do this in the context of meaningful texts. Sanacore asserted that whole language reading education is being bashed by the proponents of the standards-based initiatives. Furthermore, Sanacore supported middle school as a time of exploration and a time to discover things about the world and the self. Particularly for at risk and special needs youngsters, this period of exploration and self discovery was crucial to their development as a reader.

Rankhorn et al. (1998) reported middle school students in whole language reading classrooms had many opportunities to read independently to choose what they would read. Sometimes, their choices were inhibited by the curriculum. For example, students were able to choose from a number of books, but all of the options had to relate to the American Revolution or to some other topic. Rankhorn et al. stated that students were motivated to read despite the limited selection sometimes available to them. It seemed that even a limited choice encouraged the reluctant reader to take part in reading. The important point here is that the student was able to choose. Many times the students were free to choose what they wanted to read. Even the least proficient reader was treated as a reader and was expected to read during this time of independent reading.

Student Preferences and Motivation

Reading preferences. In a qualitative study, Swartz and Hendricks (2000) found that students with special needs preferred horror stories, mystery stories, and action adventure books in that order. Additionally, R. L.Stine, the author of the *Goosebumps* series, was selected as the favorite author of five of the students while four others chose

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Stephen King. Other authors mentioned were: Marc Brown, Matt Christopher, and L. M. Montgomery. Very few students were concerned with the author's writing style. Approximately one third of the students stated they would select a book based on a favorite character. Also, one third of the students described that the ability to relate to a character was important to them. Fifteen students stated that cover illustrations led them to select certain books. Eighteen students said they read the back of the book summaries before selecting a book. Another important factor in book selection was an appealing title as 14 students stated that this led them to select certain books. Sixteen students liked shorter books because they did not lose interest in the books. Books based on popular movies or television shows were popular as 11 students chose books for this reason. Some of the students (16) selected books based on a friend's recommendation. Finally, most of the responses indicated that students used a variety of strategies for selecting books. The researchers concluded that students with special needs were not so different and wanted to enjoy the same books as typically developing children.

Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) reported the overwhelming top two preferences for middle school readers were scary stories and cartoons and comics. The availability of the most popular types of materials students read was limited in the typical school. The reasons were wide ranging. When *Goosebumps* was stocked in the library, the books would often remain checked out. Popular magazines disappeared quickly and were not replaced. Some librarians and teachers expressed the view that they wanted the students to read real books. Worthy et al.'s (1999) findings supported the view that there was an ever-increasing gap between students' preferences and materials that schools provided and recommended. The authors stated the best answer in motivating students to

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read was as simple as encouraging them to follow their interests and providing books that reached those interests in the reading classroom.

A. Cole (1998) found that beginner-oriented texts for the emergent and struggling reader during independent reading time may be just the segue that allows that reader to experience success. Reluctant readers in an eighth grade middle school classroom were motivated to read by the freedom of choice inherent in independent reading time. Cole found that once this choice was allowed, students' motivation transferred to more traditional types of reading that might be found in a more typical eighth grade class.

Additional research by Harmon (1998) supported this observation in a middle school classroom. Harmon also discussed how vocabulary development improved as a result of having time for independent reading in a literature-based middle school classroom. Harmon asserted that independent reading time exposed the student to an ever-increasing vocabulary and improved overall vocabulary because the student was exposed to more and more words as his or her reading improves.

Reading and sharing. Horn (2000) concluded that when students were allowed to freely share literature with their classmates, many unmotivated learners participated in class discussions. Her "Reader of the Day," in which selected students gave book talks on books they read, promoted student interaction with classmates. This interaction empowered the students to make choices they valued regarding personal reading selections. Consequently, students were more motivated to read when free choice of reading material was part of the curriculum.

Cassady (1998) used wordless books as a tool to encourage and motivate reluctant readers in a middle school classroom. In this study, the teacher led a group of middle

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school students in story development by using wordless books as their basis for the story. This technique motivated the reluctant middle school reader and demonstrated what a powerful tool wordless books could be in boosting the growth of reluctant readers.

Whole language reading teachers have discovered that perhaps the best way to develop students' reading strategies as well as their understanding and appreciation of literature is through discussion, particularly intensive small group discussion (Weaver, 1994). In these discussion groups everyone can share reactions to the literature, make connections to their own lives, and discuss literary elements such as characterization, symbol, theme, main idea, and summary. Group discussion enriched understanding because the group as a unit constructed meaning. The members of the group discussed the same book or different ones read by each member.

According to Roskos, Risko, and Vukelich (1998), good conversation and discussion were effective and sound methodologies for the conveyance of ideas. Students need the opportunity to discuss the reading before any true understanding can take place. This discussion made it easier for the students to cognitively process the ideas put forth in the reading and to gain an appreciation of what points the author was trying to make. Students allowed to discuss their reading become more motivated to read.

Worthy (1998) described the use of book talks to motivate reluctant middle school readers. He advised middle school teachers to (a) allow the students choose the books they read for class, (b) let students talk to their friends about what they like to read, (c) find some good books and other literary materials for your classroom. Worthy stated that students become motivated to read and discuss if these three suggestions are followed.

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Gaskins (1998) concluded that teaching at-risk and delayed readers involved more than just good reading instruction. She avowed several reasons why her students learned to read. First, her students read numerous books and discussed what they read with the teacher and with other students. Second, students were taught about words using implicit phonics. Third, they were taught how to learn and how to use productive strategies across the curriculum in a whole language framework. Finally, the students were taught to take charge of their own personal learning style and motivation.

Summary

This literature review first examined the components of a whole language approach to reading instruction. From the research examined it was determined that its origins are research based, and that the approach primarily relies on a constructivist view of learning that emphasizes active rather than passive learning. Additionally, the 12 basic principles of the whole language/constructivist model as detailed by Poplin (1988) were listed.

Recent research on whole language reading education demonstrated that students in whole language reading classrooms do as well or better on standardized reading tests and subtests. Additionally, research promoting the usefulness of whole language instruction for developing the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities was examined. Some investigators demonstrated that whole language reading instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities increased the reading ability of these students Literature on the importance of motivation for middle school students with learning disabilities was investigated. Research demonstrating that analytical phonics was taught in a whole language reading classroom was examined.

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Research pertaining to motivating the middle school student labeled as at risk and those with learning disabilities was considered. Other studies were discussed that explored the needs of students with learning disabilities and how these needs could be fulfilled by participating in a whole language reading curriculum.

The reading preferences of middle school students with learning disabilities were also explored. The ability to choose books that were interesting was seen as a motivating factor for these students.

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